

## Animism: Multi-Species Research Methods and the Taxus Baccata

“Let this tree be the tree of hope for all of us” (Meredith, 1994).

In this essay I will be exploring the concept of animism through the genres of anthrozoology and multi-species ethnography including symbiosis and intersubjective relationships between humans, non-humans and plants. I will define these terms using the ancient yew tree as a symbol to highlight the vital importance of our need to re awaken lost perceptions of micro ecological environments which connect to the greater whole.

I am using the Yew tree as a metaphor to highlight the importance of researching animism through non-human species within their natural environments, and to describe how a tree is a complete life force in combination with other beings in the form of a living web, that maybe invisible to the human eye, but from the perspective of our fellow species, and ancestors, an important component of themselves. The Yew tree demonstrates how ancient societies ritualised the tree and how the Yew held an important role in generations of people and non-human animals who still rely on the berries and evergreen foliage for sustenance and security (Hageneder, 2013). Through investigating historical interpretations of animism, we can learn more about ourselves and improve the way we interact and encounter other human beings and fellow species.

Anthrozoology is a worthy subject to enable research to help establish security for ancient trees such as the Yew. It brings together philosophy, religion, and ecology within the natural sciences to guide research methods towards the human animal whole and highlight the importance of protecting natural spaces for future generations of all species (Hosey and Melfi, 2019). According to these authors anthrozoology is the inter disciplinary study of human and non-human animal relations covering many different species, behaviours and ecologies through geographical, cultural and historical divisions. With a “new sense of urgency” (Mullin, 1999) non-human animals have recently become more of an interest in academic study. In scrutinising this area of the social sciences, it is said to highlight unknown aspects of our own humanity, (Hurn, 2012, p.3).

The invisible ‘roots’ of Animism can be considered as the relationships between inanimate and animate ‘things’ that bring in other subjects such as botany, history, philosophy, cosmology and anthrozoology, raising interesting philosophical debate (Encyclopaedia of Cultural and Social Anthropology, 2002). I intend to interrogate this concept through indigenous theories where a nature-culture divide does not exist.

Forests are a vital part of life for many people and non-human animals throughout the world and have been for millions of years, it is important that we acknowledge their value as our ancestors have to save forests and living beings who depend on trees for their survival (Kohn, 2013). Half the biomass of a forest is hidden underground, which could contribute to the reason why we don't see or take heed of what a tree makes up. There are more life forms in a handful of forest soil than there are people on the planet and terrestrial plankton is the first link to the food chain for thousands of animals such as beetle mites, pseudo centipedes and weevils (Hageneder, 2013). This author describes how these ancient trees are dependent on this cycle of death, decay, and rejuvenation along with other life forms in order to survive.

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Indigenous people and anthropologists who have ethnographically studied indigenous belief systems, bring an awareness to the importance of ancient places such as forests where a single tree can envelop a world of its own, supporting millions of life forms. By understanding the importance of these living ancient natural monuments, we re-awaken our lost relationship with nature.

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